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Chile: Accentuating the Positive

President Pinochet's intention to give the government a greater civilian cast and to take another step in improving Chile's international image partially explains the Cabinet reorganization announced on 12 April. His action also may have been calculated to counter some impressions that he has lost his grip on government in the face of pressing foreign and domestic problems. 150

By naming a widely trusted civilian lawyer, Sergio Fernandez, to the key Interior Ministry post, Pinochet fulfilled a pledge made earlier in the month to give civilians a broader role in planning the transition to constitutional rule. Fernandez, who served as labor minister until late last year, was vested with authority as "super minister" to fill the remaining Cabinet positions. The President also implied that Fernandez would have an important role in guiding the transition process.

Of the 16 Cabinet members, only five are now officers--the fewest since the military intervention in 1973. Each of the four armed services lost a slot. The shift of the ineffective General Benevides from the interior to the defense portfolio seems intended to remove him from the critical process of completing a new constitution and organizing a plebiscite to approve it. Pinochet has retained the former defense minister, General Brady, as a special adviser on defense matters, perhaps with the intention of employing him on high-level missions to discuss Chile's differences with the military regimes on its borders. Pinochet is apprehensive about encirclement by potential adversaries, which--together with the damage caused by the Letelier murder--is further motivation for his current liberalizing trend.

Hernan Cubillos, a publishing magnate, was named to replace Admiral Carvajal in the Foreign Ministry. Cubillos will be confronted with the tough job of managing relations with an antagonistic world and, in particular,

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of dealing with the sensitive border issues that persist in relations with Chile's neighbors. While Cubillos is considered to be intelligent and aggressive, he has no prior diplomatic experience.

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In yet another move expected to generate favorable reaction abroad, Pinochet is moving forward with plans to pardon or exonerate persons convicted, paroled, or exiled internally by military courts--a measure that may ultimately benefit about 600 people. This action would clear the deck of practically all remaining cases of punishment meted out for political offenses and go a long way toward accommodating longstanding demands by critics and human rights advocates.



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